

## **International conflicts**

### **Aufgaben**

- 1 Sum up the text. (Material)  
**(30 BE)**
  
- 2 Point out characteristics of failed states, taking Afghanistan as an example (Material), and compare them to a functioning democracy as for example Germany or the UK.  
**(40 BE)**
  
- 3 Evaluate possible measures by the international community designed to stabilize the situation in countries like Afghanistan or others dealt with in class.  
**(30 BE)**

**Material****Henry Kissinger: Why America failed in Afghanistan (2021)**

The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan focuses the immediate concern on the extrication<sup>1</sup> of tens of thousands of Americans, allies and Afghans stranded all over the country. Their rescue needs to be our urgent priority. The more fundamental concern, however, is how America found itself moved to withdraw in a decision taken without much warning or consultation with allies or the people most directly involved in 20 years of sacrifice. [...]

An underlying issue has dogged our counterinsurgency<sup>2</sup> efforts from Vietnam to Iraq for over a generation. When the United States risks the lives of its military, stakes its prestige and involves other countries, it must do so on the basis of a combination of strategic and political objectives. Strategic, to make clear the circumstances for which we fight; political, to define the governing framework to sustain the outcome both within the country concerned and internationally. [...] The failure to link them to each other has involved America in conflicts without definable terminal points and caused us internally to dissolve unified purpose in a swamp of domestic controversies.

We entered Afghanistan amid wide public support in response to the al-Qaeda attack on America launched from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. [...] We convinced ourselves that ultimately the re-establishment of terrorist bases could only be prevented by transforming Afghanistan into a modern state with democratic institutions and a government that ruled constitutionally. [...]

For Afghanistan has never been a modern state. Statehood presupposes a sense of common obligation and centralisation of authority. Afghan soil, rich in many elements, lacks these. Building a modern democratic state in Afghanistan where the government's writ<sup>3</sup> runs uniformly throughout the country implies a timeframe of many years, indeed decades. [...] It was precisely Afghanistan's fractiousness, inaccessibility and absence of central authority that made it an attractive base for terrorist networks in the first place. [...]

Over time, the war took on the unlimited characteristic of previous counterinsurgency campaigns in which domestic American support progressively weakened with the passage of time. The destruction of Taliban bases was essentially achieved. But nation-building in a war-torn country absorbed substantial military forces. The Taliban could be contained but not eliminated. And the introduction of unfamiliar forms of government weakened political commitment and enhanced already rife corruption.

Afghanistan thereby repeated previous patterns of American domestic controversies. What the counterinsurgency side of the debate defined as progress, the political one treated as disaster. The two groups tended to paralyse each other during successive administrations of both parties. [...]

What had been neglected was a conceivable alternative combining achievable objectives. Counterinsurgency might have been reduced to the containment, rather than the destruction, of the Taliban. [...]

Would it have been possible to co-ordinate some common counterinsurgency efforts? To be sure, India, China, Russia and Pakistan often have divergent interests. A creative diplomacy might have distilled common measures for overcoming terrorism in Afghanistan. [...]

But this alternative was never explored. Having campaigned against the war, Presidents Donald Trump and Joe Biden undertook peace negotiations with the Taliban to whose extirpation<sup>4</sup> we had

<sup>1</sup> extrication – the act of removing someone from a place

<sup>2</sup> counterinsurgency – action taken against a group of people who are trying to take control of a country by force

<sup>3</sup> writ – a formal written order

<sup>4</sup> extirpation – complete destruction

40 committed ourselves, and induced allies to help, 20 years ago. These have now culminated in what amounts to unconditional American withdrawal by the Biden administration.

Describing the evolution does not eliminate the callousness<sup>5</sup> and, above all, the abruptness of the withdrawal decision. America cannot escape being a key component of international order because of its capacities and historic values. It cannot avoid it by withdrawing. How to combat, limit and overcome terrorism enhanced and supported by countries with a self-magnifying<sup>6</sup> and ever more  
45 sophisticated technology will remain a global challenge. It must be resisted by national strategic interests together with whatever international structure we are able to create by a commensurate<sup>7</sup> diplomacy.

We must recognise that no dramatic strategic move is available in the immediate future to offset this self-inflicted setback, such as by making new formal commitments in other regions. American  
50 rashness<sup>8</sup> would compound disappointment among allies, encourage adversaries, and sow confusion among observers. [...] Democracies evolve in a conflict of factions. They achieve greatness by their reconciliations.

Henry Kissinger: The future of American power. Henry Kissinger on why America failed in Afghanistan, in: The Economist, 25.08.2021, URL: <https://www.economist.com/by-invitation/2021/08/25/henry-kissinger-on-why-america-failed-in-afghanistan> (abgerufen am 17.12.2021).

### Hinweis

Henry Kissinger was Secretary of State in the US from 1973 to 1977. He also served as Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs from 1969 to 1975.

---

<sup>5</sup> callousness – heartlessness

<sup>6</sup> self-magnifying – to enlarge in fact or in appearance by itself

<sup>7</sup> commensurate – corresponding in size, extent, amount, or degree

<sup>8</sup> rashness – thoughtlessness